



Belmont Permit Center TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

NATIVE OAK TREES: **TIPS ON TAKING CARE OF YOUR LANDSCAPE SPECIMENS**

1. Pruning: Do not lion-tail or top prune oaks. Lion-tailing involves removal of most of the lower branches and inner foliage, leaving a “lolly-pop” tree structure that can be both hazardous and detrimental to the tree’s health. Instead, have an ISA certified arborist perform “thinning pruning” and/or end-weight reduction by removing selected branches mostly from the outside of the canopy. Current recommendation is to prune in summer dormant period when bark beetle species and Phytophthora fungus are less active.
2. Irrigation: Do not start irrigating pre-existing native California oaks in summer, unless they are new plantings or have been irrigated for many years without causing trunk cankers at the base. These oaks are adapted to a dry Mediterranean climate with no summer rainfall. New plantings should be irrigated via drip bubblers for the first few years.
3. Sprinkler Danger: Adjust sprinkler systems to not contact tree trunks. Use drip or bubbler systems instead of overhead sprinklers. Consistent water on the trunk can cause disease.
4. Trenching: Keep all irrigation trenching and other subsurface earth disturbance such as utility line trenching and foundation footings outside the dripline (canopy edge) of the tree.
5. Trees Hate Turfgrass and stones: Keep all turfgrass outside the canopy dripline. Keep landscape stones at least 2’ away from the trunk.
6. Roots: Root rot fungi can enter oak trees stressed from over-pruning, over-irrigation, or summer irrigation, causing decline. Root zone compaction from development and even casual vehicle traffic can also cause severe decline. Remember that the trees’ roots are located mainly in the area 0”-12” below ground level, spreading out at least 1.5-3X the distance of the dripline. Check the lower 6’ feet of the tree trunk for signs of decay such as black ooze, mushrooms, or canker sores. Do not fertilize an oak infected with root rot fungus before consulting with an experienced certified arborist or arborist consultant.
7. Mulch: Broad rings of mulch, wood chips, or compost lain around the tree may be beneficial to soil structure and tree health if kept no thicker than 3-4”. These are best kept at least 2-3’ away from the trunk. Otherwise, root burn or root rot fungus problems may occur.

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8. Fertilizing: Do not fertilize unless the tree is doing very poorly, in which case use a complete balanced formula like 15-15-15. Nitrogen content should be at least 50% water-insoluble (slow-release) forms of nitrogen (check the package label). “Nitrate” is a quick-release form of nitrogen that could harm your oak. “Organic” forms of nitrogen are those which have a carbon atom attached to the nitrogen molecule. Organic forms of nitrogen generally release more slowly to the tree over a longer time period than inorganic forms.
9. Plants for under oaks (adapted from a list by Barrie D. Coate & Associates). These plants require no irrigation in summer after the first year or two, and can tolerate shading:
 - A. *Arctostaphylos* (Manzanita species). California native.
 - B. *Artemisia* species (California native sages)
 - C. *Choisya ternata* (Mexican Mock Orange). Fragrant flowers.
 - D. *Diplacus* hybrids (Monkey Flower). Hybridized native.
 - E. *Heteromeles arbutifolia* (Toyon). Native California tree.
 - F. *Iris douglasiana* hybrids (native Californian iris hybrids).
 - G. *Mahonia aquifolium compacta* (Compact Oregon Grape)
 - H. *Rhamnus californica* (Coffeeberry).
 - I. *Ribes* (Current, Gooseberry). California native.
 - J. *Sisyrinchium bellum* (California Blue-Eyed Grass). Beautiful, low-lying native.